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Wednesday, 5 November 2003, 3 p.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 17

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(h) Appointment of a member of the Joint Inspection Unit

Note by the Secretary-General (A/58/108)

The President: As indicated in document A/58/108, the General Assembly is required, during the fifty-eighth session, to appoint a member to fill the vacancy in the Joint Inspection Unit that will arise from the expiration of the term of office on 31 December 2004 of Mr. Sumihiro Kuyama of Japan.

As indicated in document A/58/108, in accordance with article 3, paragraph 1, of the Statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, the President of the General Assembly shall consult with Member States to draw up a list of countries — in this case, one country — which would be requested to propose a candidate for appointment to the Joint Inspection Unit.

After holding the necessary consultations, I should like to communicate to the Assembly that the information that I have received from the Chairman of the Group of Asian States is that for one vacancy from the Asian States, there are two candidates, namely Japan and Pakistan.

Since there are two candidates for one vacancy, I should like, in accordance with past practice, to consult with Member States through the procedure of holding an advisory vote by secret ballot to select one country from among the Asian States to be requested to propose a candidate for appointment to the Joint Inspection Unit. Although this advisory vote would not be an election, we would follow the rules of procedure of the Assembly governing elections.

If there is no objection, may I take it that the General Assembly agrees to that procedure?

It was so decided.

The President: In accordance with existing practice, the country receiving the greatest number of votes, and not less than a majority of the votes of those present and voting, shall be requested to propose a candidate for appointment to the Joint Inspection Unit. May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to that procedure also?

It was so decided.

The President: In the case of a tie vote, there will be a restricted ballot limited to those candidates that have obtained an equal number of votes — which is not a problem in this case. May I take it that the Assembly agrees to that procedure also?

It was so decided.

The President: Also in connection with this selection process, I would like to remind members that

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in accordance with Article 19 of the Charter and resolution 58/1 of 16 October 2003, two Member States will not be given ballot papers.

May I remind members that the Assembly is not appointing members to the Joint Inspection Unit at this time. It is only selecting one country, which will be requested to propose a candidate. Therefore, only the name of a country, and not the name of an individual, should appear on the ballot paper.

I should like now to repeat the names of the two countries from among the Asian States that wished to propose a candidate: Japan and Pakistan.

I should further like to point out that from the Asian States, China already has a national serving on the Joint Inspection Unit. The name of that State should therefore not appear on the ballot paper.

The Assembly will now proceed to the selection of one country from among the Asian States, which will be requested to propose a candidate to fill the vacancy in the Joint Inspection Unit.

Before we begin the voting process, I should like to remind members that pursuant to rule 88 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, no representative shall interrupt the voting except on a point of order on the actual conduct of the voting.

We shall now begin the voting process.

Ballot papers marked "B" will now be distributed. May I request representatives to write on the ballot paper the name of the one State for which they wish to vote. Ballot papers bearing the name of more than one State will be declared invalid. A ballot containing the name of a Member State that does not belong to the relevant region or the name of an individual shall not be counted at all.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Stoev (Bulgaria), Mr. Villacis (Ecuador), Ms. Kiel (Germany) and Mrs. Faye (Senegal) acted as tellers.

A vote was taken by secret ballot.

The meeting was suspended at 3.25 p.m. and resumed at 3.45 p.m.

The President: The result of the voting is as follows:

Number of ballot papers:	185
Number of invalid ballots:	2
Number of valid ballots:	183
Abstentions:	0
Number of members voting:	183
Required majority:	92
Number of votes obtained:	
Japan	101
Pakistan	82

Having obtained the required majority, Japan was selected to be requested to propose a candidate for appointment to the Joint Inspection Unit.

The President: I thank members for their advice, and I thank the tellers for their assistance.

In accordance with article 3, paragraph 1 of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, Japan will be requested to submit the name of a candidate and a curriculum vitae highlighting the candidate's relevant qualifications for the tasks ahead.

After holding the appropriate consultations described in article 3, paragraph 2, of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, including consultations with the President of the Economic and Social Council and with the Secretary-General in his capacity as Chairman of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the President of the General Assembly will propose a qualified candidate to the Assembly for appointment to the Joint Inspection Unit.

We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of sub-item (h) of agenda item 17.

Agenda item 20

Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/392)

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Luvsangiin Erdenechuluun, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia.

Mr. Erdenechuluun (Mongolia): It is a distinct honour and privilege for me in my capacity as President of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies to report to the present session of the General Assembly on the outcome of the

Conference held from 10 to 12 September this year in the city of Ulaanbaatar. While the first Conference, held in 1988 in Manila, was attended by the representatives of 13 countries, the delegates of 119 countries from around the world, a host of international organizations, including the United Nations, and about 100 non-governmental organizations participated in the Ulaanbaatar Conference.

That testifies to the dynamic expansion of the movement embracing both young and mature democracies. It is of special significance to my country, Mongolia, that this conference on global democracy has taken place in the heart of Asia, where empires were born and crumbled, where unprecedented social experiments had taken place and where we now see the emergence of a new global commitment to democracy and good governance.

For Mongolia to host that prestigious global assembly was a matter of great honour. We saw it also as a great responsibility. Today I am happy to report to the Assembly that the Conference has been a success, and that is a conclusion shared by all the participants. I avail myself of this opportunity to thank all the countries for their active participation in the work of the Conference. My special appreciation goes to Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Germany, Japan, Italy, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Qatar, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, the European Commission, Canada Fund and the organizations of the United Nations system for their valuable assistance and support in organizing this important event.

A record number of States — as I said 119, with some 30 of them at the ministerial or equivalent levels — participated in the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, thus registering the highest proportion of high-ranking officials at a gathering of the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies.

An innovation in the Conference was a parallel Parliamentary Forum, organized jointly by the Parliament of Mongolia and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It brought together 120 members of parliament from 47 countries. A highly interactive civil society forum, with 240 participants from 64 countries, preceded the Conference. Both forums presented their results to the Conference. In addition, the Governments of participating countries were encouraged to include in their national delegations members of parliament and representatives of civil society. That was also the case with most of the delegations represented at the Conference.

This three-tiered format was introduced for the first time at the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, and I believe that future conferences should continue this practice, as it proved its usefulness and relevance in Ulaanbaatar.

The main theme of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies was "Democracy, good governance and civil society". The agenda reflected the most pressing and critical issues of democracy around the world. The discussion was structured around the three main areas of concern: strengthening democratic governance and cooperation with civil society, challenges to and opportunities for democracy and partnership and participation in poverty reduction and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

The delegates engaged in a fundamental debate on how to consolidate the political choice of democracy and sustain it both by the people's own efforts politically, economically and intellectually, and by global commitments to democracy by nations both large and small. In the words of Mongolia's President, Mr. Natsagiyn Bagabandi, democracy is not a fairy tale — neither is it a gift from someone. Democracy, as an outstanding achievement of humanity, makes it a duty for everyone committed to it to strengthen its political institutions and safeguard it against any risks.

The delegates to the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies received a message from Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in which he noted the progress made in democratic development but cautioned against triumphalism, given the setbacks around the world, including the weakening of the substance of democracy, the abuse of electoral systems and the alienation of a growing number of people who felt marginalized and excluded.

Some 70 heads of delegations spoke in the plenary, exchanging experiences in promoting democracy and good governance, as well as identifying the manifold challenges facing democracy in both national and international contexts, along with ways and means to address them. The keynote address to the Conference was delivered by Prime Minister Enkhbayar, who presented an in-depth analysis of

Mongolia's democratic movement in its historical perspective and offered specific ideas and suggestions aimed at strengthening the movement of new or restored democracies in the evolving globalizing environment in which we live.

The Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies focused on the following qualitative and substantive issues of democracy and their solutions: the rule of law, improvement of democratic constitutional arrangements, democratic political and electoral systems, the threat of electoral fundamentalism and the need for electoral reforms, civil and political rights of citizens, accountability and transparency of government, the dangers of bureaucracy and corruption, consolidation of multi-party systems, the role of a free media, civil society organizations as vehicles of democracy, institutional arrangements for State-civil society partnerships, the ability of local communities to participate in decision-making, inclusiveness of the democratic process and the representation and participation of citizens. The delegates were unanimous in their belief that democracy should not be taken for granted and that it could only be strengthened through a wide and inclusive discussion of the issues just outlined and the mustering of the requisite political will and solidarity. They also noted that democratic reforms were a continuous process with no one-size-fits-all solutions. Nevertheless, the basic values and principles as well as the normative dimensions of democracy embodied in the basic human rights instruments serve as the essential guidelines to be respected by all democracies, both young and old.

The leitmotif of the deliberations at the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies was the need for a higher quality of democracy, its entrenchment, and the internalization of a democratic culture. One of the most important aspects of democracy is good governance. The delegates concentrated on ways to make governance more effective and participatory, more transparent and just, more responsive and responsible.

During the discussions at the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies strong concern was voiced that globalization has been largely detrimental to democracy, as it has caused increased poverty and marginalization, especially among the most vulnerable. While globalization was seen to present a number of opportunities, it was emphasized that in order to mitigate the negative effects of globalization various international regulatory frameworks needed to be put in place.

The delegates unanimously condemned terrorism and upheld the central role of the United Nations in fighting that scourge. The deliberations also called for global democratic multilateralism to strengthen strategic partnerships for democracy, development and social progress. The attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and the elimination of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion also required a genuine partnership for development at national, regional and international levels.

At the end of deliberations, the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies adopted two major documents reflecting the core principles and undertakings discussed by the participants and charting the future for democratic development. The Ulaanbaatar Declaration and Plan of Action will guide the activities of the Conference in the coming years. Both documents serve to preserve the continuity of the ideas of previous Conferences and at the same time to find new ways to strengthen democracy and the international democratic movement.

The Ulaanbaatar Declaration of the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies sets forth six key principles of democratic society: they are just and responsible; they are inclusive and participatory; they promote and protect the rights and freedoms of all their members; they are open and transparent; they function under agreed rules of law and accountability, regardless of the challenges they may face; and they show solidarity towards others. The participants agreed on a total of 52 commitments based on the six principles; the Plan of Action outlines ways in which those commitments can be implemented at the national, regional and international levels. In this respect, on behalf of my Government, I wish to commend the Secretary-General for his report under the agenda item before us (A/58/392), which, in addition to outlining the work and results of the Fifth Conference, provides an analytical description of the activities carried out by the United Nations system in recent years in the area of assistance to democracy and good governance.

Having ensured that democracy is at the heart of all the measures laid out in the Declaration and the Plan of Action, our primary responsibility now is to see that those measures are fulfilled. The Plan of Action

strongly recommends strengthening the Follow-up Mechanism to promote and implement the measures endorsed at the Ulaanbaatar Conference. Proceeding from this premise, I would like to share with the Assembly some preliminary ideas on how to ensure an effective follow-up.

First, as recommended by the Ulaanbaatar Conference, the President of the Conference, with the assistance of the United Nations, is asked to establish a working group to examine the conclusions of the Fifth Conference, as well as the proposals made in background papers and interventions, in order to make follow-up more effective and efficient and to draw up a practical programme of work. The working group is to operate within a defined time frame and come up with specific proposals on guiding the implementation of the final documents of the Fifth Conference and monitoring its progress. I believe that the group of the friends of the Chair informally established at the end of the Ulaanbaatar Conference will be formalized shortly and serve as a core of this working group. I understand that informal consultations are under way to find an acceptable solution to that issue.

The Plan of Action calls for the development of national plans to strengthen democracy, the preparation of country information notes outlining the prospects of advancing and deepening democracy in a given country and the development of nationally owned democratic indicators databases so as to better track the progress of democratic development. Apart from helping national consensus-building by engaging all stakeholders, in our view this exercise will also contribute to further the national consolidation of democracy. The Plan of Action also recommends that the development of nationally owned democratic indicators should benefit from the current work being done in other multilateral forums. The experience and expertise of ongoing practices could prove useful in developing a methodology to be pursued in national exercises.

Secondly, I intend to conduct consultations with the chairs of relevant regional organizations on possible avenues of cooperation to advance the implementation of activities identified in the Plan of Action for regional action.

Thirdly, I would like to suggest a regular meeting schedule for the Follow-up Mechanism, so that it may better sustain and monitor the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies process. This will be especially helpful as we tend to be distracted by the daily affairs of diplomacy in which we are immersed. However, the role that we have chosen demands that we, as diplomats, work as both leaders and guardians of the spirit of the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies.

Fourthly, in pursuit of the Plan of Action of the Conference, I intend to initiate discussions with the Chair of the Community of Democracies to exchange views on ways that the two movements can be brought closer together and complement one another.

Fifthly, I will conduct consultations with interested countries on the venue, timing and the theme of the next International Conference of New or Restored Democracies. So far, the State of Qatar has made an official offer to host that Conference in Doha, which was duly noted at the Ulaanbaatar Conference.

Sixthly, my delegation has prepared a draft resolution under this agenda item, reflecting the proceedings and outcome of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies. I am pleased to inform you that as a result of consultations, Mongolia, together with 76 sponsors, has submitted a draft resolution, which I hope will command the widest possible support of this august Assembly. We also hope that many more countries will join the draft resolution as sponsors in the days ahead.

Although the lights at the Conference podium are now dimmed, the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies process should go on, and our words need to be backed by action, action that is united and focused on essentials. Let us therefore move forward, shoulder to shoulder and in a concerted way, to strengthen democracy and good governance in the world at large. As was eloquently said in the song devoted to the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, let us all stand tall together for democracy and peace: the movement for the people; the movement for the free.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. We have no doubt that — with your experience, diplomatic skill and great patience — you will leave a distinct imprint on the work of this session. We wish you every success.

Democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interrelated and mutually reinforcing elements provided for by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. They are also among the principles and foundations underpinning any democratic society. Democracy is the aspiration of people to choose their own cultural, social, economic and political systems and to participate fully in all walks of life. While acknowledging the importance for democracy of free and fair periodic elections, democracy itself must be viewed as a process whose requirements exceed the mere holding of elections. Any democratic system must provide its citizens with opportunities for full participation in all aspects of society while taking into account the primacy of law. Democracy must include commitment to the principles, rules, institutions and actions that guarantee representation and accountability and protect individuals and groups from arbitrary conduct, injustice or oppression by the State or by any other party.

Well-established democracies have undergone a great variety of experiences before arriving at their current stage of intellectual maturity and their acceptance of the opinions of others. There is no single universal model of democratic practices in the world, but, rather, there are many features common to all democratic States. Most models include political participation, joint decision-making and public freedoms. Emanating from his belief in those great principles, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of the State of Qatar, has exerted major efforts to achieve the social, political and economic objectives of the State of Qatar through the establishment of democracy, the reform of the economy and insuring a quiet transformation to a modern and democratic State.

Qatari society has experienced a major transformation that includes all aspects of a modern State and assumes responsibility for the welfare of its people. The first such step was the abolition of the Ministry of Information and Culture, in an effort to enhance the role of a free press, and the implementation of numerous United Nations human rights conventions and protocols to which Qatar had acceded. Among other major steps was the holding of free municipal elections on 8 March 1999 in which women were candidates and voted on an equal footing with men. Moreover, in 2000 the State of Qatar embarked upon a new democratic political experiment based on popular participation in public affairs through elected bodies and councils and on the establishment of forums for freedom of expression.

Those steps culminated in the drafting of the Constitution, which represents a very important development. The date of 29 April 2003 marked a milestone in our lives, both as a people and as a State. After 30 years under an amended provisional statute that was no longer consistent with the requirements of the times, we now have a permanent Constitution. The Constitution guarantees personal freedom and equal opportunity for citizens and protects private property. It also provides equal rights and duties for citizens and prohibits the deportation of any citizen or preventing citizens from returning to the country. The Constitution has created a climate that accommodates all kinds of expression, broadens the scope of the freedom of the press and publishing and allows everyone freedom of religion, worship and belief. The Qatari people have become the source of authority and legislation is the prerogative of an elected legislature.

The elections served as a referendum on an extremely important document that will open up great prospects for an honourable future for our country. Given that 96.6 per cent of voters supported the Constitution, the results confirmed the people's genuine desire for democracy and freedom of opinion, whatever those opinions might be. Of course, that percentage also lent credibility to the results, which garnered international appreciation and respect and underscored the seriousness of the democratic process. The great level of participation was a response to the call made by the Emir of the State of Qatar in a speech addressed to the people of Qatar. The Emir said,

> "I urge you to vote on the Constitution today because it is of you and from you, heeding the words of Allah the Almighty — 'Consult them in their affairs and let their affairs be the subject of consultation among them' — and emanating from our belief in the importance of your views for the present and for the better future of the country, the citizens and new generations."

In that regard, I would like to point out that the State of Qatar participated at a high level in the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored

Democracies, which was held from 10 to 12 September 2003 in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. The head of the delegation of Qatar, reflecting the belief of the State of Qatar in democracy and its support for its exercise at every international and domestic level, as well as its support for international cooperation, expressed in his statement before the Conference the hope of the State of Qatar to host the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies in Doha in 2006. That initiative was supported by many of the States participating in the Conference, including the Arab States. The last paragraph of the final report of the Ulaanbaatar Conference also referred to the generous offer by the State of Qatar. While reaffirming its initiative to host the next Conference, the delegation of the State of Qatar urges all delegations to respond positively to that request and to support it, because that would be a positive step in supporting the Government and people of the State of Qatar in consolidating democratic ideals in the State and in the region.

As a modern democracy, the Government of the State of Qatar has affirmed at all levels in international forums its total and equal commitment both to its political responsibility and its national interests. It has also stressed that it has consistently pursued a clear foreign policy based on respect for the sovereignty, independence and national interests of States, and based on friendship and mutual respect. Moreover, we have underscored our belief in democratic international cooperation, as well as our strong support for international efforts aimed at the peaceful settlement of disputes and crises within the framework of international legitimacy. Qatar adopted that democratic approach in order to establish a system based on strong constitutional institutions.

Mr. Adechi (Benin) (*spoke in French*): The accession of a growing number of countries to the ideals of democracy has become a basic characteristic of the new era that has emerged in the world since the major political and social changes of the end of the 1980s. The Secretary-General's exhaustive report (A/58/392) on the support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies makes it possible to measure both the progress made and the scope of this socio-economic phenomenon that aims to promote the establishment of a framework conducive to the development of humankind. We should welcome the diverse work done by the United Nations system to support that process and to contribute to the strengthening of governance.

The series of International Conferences of New or Restored Democracies has served as a manifestation of that support. The Secretary-General's report also allows us to appreciate the multidimensional character of that process and the intrinsic link that exists between democracy and the aspirations of peoples to live and prosper in peace, security and social justice. From Manila to Ulaanbaatar, the International Conferences of New or Restored Democracies have made considerable progress. At each stage, they have dealt with issues that are crucial to our peoples. Three years ago, my country hosted the Conference on behalf of Africa, at which the new or restored democracies and their partners considered the subjects of peace, security, democracy and development. Asia is now carrying the torch, and has injected new momentum into this great movement by focusing attention on the issues of democracy, good governance and civil society. I would like to warmly congratulate the people and Government of Mongolia for all their efforts to organize and ensure the success of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies.

At Ulaanbaatar we once again saw that democracy is a great cause to which our peoples are committed. But the debate has once again outlined the challenges faced by democracy in our countries. Those challenges — international terrorism, transnational crime, corruption, unemployment and poverty — are greatly jeopardizing the very nature of the rule of law and democracy. They can only be definitively dealt with through the sustained and concerted mobilization of all national and international stakeholders. At Ulaanbaatar, civil society emerged as a decisive player and essential component in the building of democracy and the rule of law. In that regard, the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies expanded the debate by establishing a dialogue between civil society actors, parliamentarians and Governments, all of which are both actors and promoters of democratic life in our countries.

My delegation therefore welcomes the particular attention that the Secretary-General has paid to the recommendations of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies in his report, which is the subject of our debate this afternoon. My delegation

also supports the proposal to transform the follow-up mechanism into a formal structure that can better ensure follow-up to the implementation of the Conference's Plan of Action, as well as the continuation of thinking and exchanges of experiences on this issue.

Benin has therefore become a sponsor of the draft resolution entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies".

Mr. Balarezo (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am speaking on behalf of the 19 member States of the Rio Group, namely, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, and my own country.

The Rio Group has on numerous occasions reaffirmed its commitment to consolidate and strengthen democracy, to exercise its values and to defend its institutions. The Rio Group believes that democracy is the right of every people, and that it is the only way to effectively exercise basic freedoms and human rights.

It is for those reasons that the Rio Group has from the beginning followed with interest the development of the International Conferences of New or Restored Democracies, including the Conference recently held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, which adopted a Plan of Action and a Declaration on Democracy, Good Governance and Civil Society. Those conferences are important forums for reflection and the exchange of ideas on the strengthening, promotion and consolidation of democracies as an essential means of guaranteeing the social, political and economic development of peoples.

Last May, the Presidents of the Rio Group approved in the Cuzco Consensus a series of measures aimed at promoting democratic governance and strengthening the rule of law. Those principles, which are based on the progress made in the region, represent important guidelines applicable to all of the world's democracies due to the fact that they are all based on the same principles and values and try to fulfil the legitimate social needs of their peoples.

In that regard, the Rio Group resolved, first of all, to continue to carry out effective State reform in order to promote citizen participation and education, combat corruption and strengthen public authorities. In order to promote citizen participation, special attention has been paid to the system of political parties, movements and groups.

In that regard, the countries of the Rio Group have agreed to assume the following commitments. First, they have agreed to expand the participation of political parties, movements and groups by putting forth legislation that provides them with incentives. Secondly, the Group will also seek to ensure that political parties, movements and groups are independent from economic powers by means of providing equal access to communication media. Thirdly, the Group will strengthen financial transparency and promote internal democracy among political parties, movements and groups. Fourthly, the Group will aim to promote equal opportunity within political parties, movements and groups by supporting political training programmes, especially for women, young people, ethnic groups and marginalized populations.

Another aspect pertains to the fact that the countries of the Rio Group have endorsed the need to establish innovative financial mechanisms to strengthen democratic governance and contribute to overcoming poverty by raising new resources for productive investment and creating decent jobs. That proposal is in response to the low economic growth rates of many developing countries, which impede the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals and affect the democratic governance of those countries. Those countries are forced to confront the immediate social demands of their peoples while there continue to be restrictions on external financing, high external indebtedness, trade protectionism and inequitable globalization.

Innovative financial mechanisms would primarily seek to find additional new resources, increase the use of already available resources and diversify options and financial policies in order to create macroeconomic stability that has a direct impact on people's standard of living and makes it possible to strengthen democratic systems and their institutions. The countries of the Rio Group are working on concrete proposals that will soon be introduced for the international community's consideration.

In order to bolster the Rio Group's effort, it will be important for the Secretary-General to draw up a

comprehensive report, with the support of international financial institutions and the regional development banks, to consider proposals from various regions and countries regarding possible innovative financial mechanisms to strengthen democratic governance in such areas as public investment, infrastructure, fiscal management and external debt management.

In conclusion, the countries of the Rio Group hope to continue to contribute actively to this effort, along with all States committed to this cause, in order to promote and strengthen democracy and its values.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries of Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey and the European Free Trade Association country of Iceland align themselves with this statement.

The outcome of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, which was held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 10 to 12 September 2003, proved that there is growing support for strengthening democracy in all the regions of the world as a system of government that is based on the rule of law, allows free expression of political opinions through electoral and other participatory mechanisms and guarantees the independence of the judiciary, the freedom of the media and the promotion of human security.

The Conference also addressed the question of the many challenges to democracy, including poverty, international terrorism, transnational economic crime, HIV/AIDS and blatant disregard for human rights. It was agreed that while it is crucial to fight those threats effectively, that must be done without eroding human rights or resorting to repression. Democracy and the protection of human rights are inseparable. We cannot protect democracy while at the same time undermining human rights. It was also noted that building up democracy is a long and difficult process, and that it should not be allowed to compromise on issues such as human rights and fundamental freedoms. The participants recognized that even though democratic processes can benefit from external supports, a democratic system must have the support of the people concerned. Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that there is no universal recipe for democracy, as democracy can take different forms in different countries.

The European Union believes firmly that democracy is a prerequisite for the respect of human rights, as well as for prosperity, progress and sustainable development. It is for that very reason that the protection and advancement of democracy and the rule of law are among the top priorities of the international community. The European Union is strictly committed to the implementation and promotion worldwide of democratic principles such as those endorsed at the Conference in Ulaanbaatar.

Peace and security also depend on the spread and consolidation of democracy. A well-coordinated policy within the framework of the United Nations can help to achieve peaceful solutions to the conflicts that are threatening stability in different areas of the world. But that is not enough in itself. We also have to promote the right conditions across the world that will enable democracy to take root where it has never existed before, or where it has been eliminated by war, dictatorship or the breakdown of civil society. It is equally necessary to shore up democratic institutions in countries in transition and to support democracy in all countries that have recently moved to a democratic system. In that context, it is important to emphasize that the equal participation of women and men in political life and decision-making and the enjoyment of human rights by both genders on equal terms are prerequisites for genuine democracy.

The European Union is convinced that all democratic countries must join forces in order to advance democracy and freedom and to make them a credible model for all countries that, for one reason or another, have not yet achieved democratic standards. Sharing common democratic values brings about the need to actively confront violations of human rights whenever they occur in the world. In that light, it is also important to promote democracy-building programmes, making every effort to encourage dialogue and to overcome traditional North-South divisions.

In the view of the European Union, regional cooperation is an essential tool to promote democracy and human rights in every area of the world. The European Union itself can serve as a successful example of such cooperation. In fact, democracy and fundamental freedoms are the main pillars of the

European Union. To that end, the Amsterdam Treaty of the European Union includes respect for democratic principles among the essential conditions that must be met by any country seeking admission to the Union. Furthermore, any European Union member country failing to honour that commitment might even be suspended from membership.

The European Union fully supports, and will continue to support, the efforts of all States in the process of democratization. Consolidating democracy is one of the key objectives of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Through its cooperation programmes, the European Union concretely supports other States to promote democratization in several areas. Those include the rule of law — with special attention given to the field of justice — the effective participation of people in the democratic process, the role of civil society and the development of a consistent human rights culture. Cooperation in the electoral process also represents a considerable share of the European Union's overall contribution to democratization and sustainable development in third countries.

At the same time, as a result of its tangible commitment to support the growth of democratic institutions — particularly in countries where the construction of a democratic society confronts major difficulties — the European Union attaches the utmost importance to the efforts of the international community to devise and implement assistance and educational programmes for democracy.

Yet, democracy has to be built on the basis of universally acknowledged rules and practices, even though we think that historical or cultural regional identities should not be affected by interregional dialogue. Actually, neighbouring countries that have already reached satisfactory standards of democracy can make an extremely important contribution to all countries that are trying to build up new domestic democratic institutions. It is therefore important that the international community as a whole encourage and support all those countries as they move along that very demanding route.

Today many new democracies are making impressive strides. They need our help in order to continue down that route. The European Union does not seek to impose any particular model of democracy. We recognize the unique political, social and cultural background of each country. If our efforts are to be truly successful, we have to support those moving towards democracy by giving the highest prominence to the essential role played by civil society. We must not forget, furthermore, that without the stability afforded by democracy and the rule of law, we are unlikely to succeed in our struggle for a safer and more prosperous world.

The European Union would like to take this opportunity to thank Mongolia and its Minister for Foreign Affairs for successfully arranging the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, as well as to welcome Mongolia's work in the follow-up to the Conference and the planning of the next international conference.

Mr. Ismail (Malaysia): Allow me, at the outset, to express once again Malaysia's appreciation to the Government of Mongolia for hosting the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, which was held in Ulaanbaatar last September. We congratulate it for the excellent preparation and conduct of the meeting, which contributed to the successful outcome of the Conference. Malaysia is pleased to have participated in the Conference.

The world has changed greatly in the brief span of time between the holding of the Fourth Conference, in Benin in 2000, and the holding of the Fifth Conference, in Ulaanbaatar. Certainly, the events of 11 September 2001 and subsequent related events have marked and marred the world in a manner that could not have been predicted earlier. The current international landscape has been further swept by the winds of change and uncertainty, not least by the prospect of another country, Iraq, and its people moving towards democracy. However, Iraq has shown us that trying to impose democracy by force is not an easy task. While the United Nations is recognized by many as having an important role in promoting and strengthening democracy in Iraq, the security situation on the ground has not made it possible for the United Nations to play that role effectively. My delegation sincerely hopes that a time will soon come that will enable the United Nations to make an important contribution to the process of democratization in Iraq.

The international community must draw lessons from that. Whatever we do must be based on the model that none of us has a monopoly on wisdom. We should

keep an open mind to different ways of addressing problems. Furthermore, we must not be judgmental. My delegation makes this point coming from a nation that recognized early in its nationhood the virtues of developing a democratic system that suits our national circumstances. Like all former colonies, Malaysia and its people cherish our independence and the democratic system that we have developed in our own way while following our history, customs and traditions and taking into account the composition and cultural diversity of our society.

Since 1955 Malaysia has had 10 general elections. We have been fortunate that our successive Governments have been elected by universal suffrage through a process of free, fair and peaceful elections. Notwithstanding a brief period of one and a half years, when the Parliament was suspended as a result of racial riots in 1969, democratic rule has flourished in Malaysia because early in our history we accepted that there is no better method of governance than democracy, despite its pitfalls and imperfections. Equally important, it has flourished because we have shaped the democratic system to suit our national circumstances. A few days ago, Malaysia and the world saw the peaceful transition of leadership from a retiring Prime Minister to a new one. The Honourable Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who led the democratically elected Government for 22 years, handed over the premiership to his deputy, The Honourable Dato' Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi on 31 October 2003.

Based on Malaysia's experience, my delegation wishes to emphasise that whatever the strengths of democracy, no one unique model of democracy can be applied in all situations and for all time. Most importantly, we have also learned in Malaysia that democracy must be viewed as a means of achieving social justice and equity, and not as an end in itself.

One of the pillars of our democratic system is the different roles played by the three branches of government, as well as other actors, including the media and civil society. However, in certain societies that hold the view that a robust democracy requires social relations to be competitive rather than cooperative, and where argument is prized over consensus, there is a risk that the notion of competition is promoted to extremes. As a result, the spirit of give-and-take is weakened. When that happens, effective governance becomes impossible, particularly in countries with complex ethnic and religious make-ups, resulting in social imbalance and instability. Developing countries, and especially new democracies, can ill afford such imbalance and instability.

In order for a democratic system to flourish in these trying times, it is essential that due attention be paid to the issue of social inclusion, not only through access to the ballot box when elections are held periodically but also through addressing issues such as economic opportunity, measures to promote national integration and the recognition of the interests of minority groups.

In an interconnected world, we must all recognize the importance of having an enabling international environment in which democracy can really be promoted. There has to be a more equitable and just international system, as well as a more peaceful world for democracies to thrive. Any attempt to impose democracy or any particular model of democracy from outside will not work. The difficulties that the world has experienced since the end of the cold war have meant that the democratic dividend for the vast majority of countries involved in the transition to democracy has not yet arrived. The situation in some of these countries presents a threat to international stability as they slide into anarchy and chaos. At the same time, it seems grossly unfair that those members of the international community who have encouraged these countries to adopt rapid measures towards democracy have failed to meet their commitments.

The international community must therefore do more to ensure that an enabling environment is created for new and restored democracies to progress further, both in terms of their political and socio-economic development. For this to be achieved, it is imperative that, among other things, adequate resources be given in order to ensure the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, which provide a good framework for creating that positive environment. Assistance and cooperation is vital, including from the United Nations system.

When we get down to brass tacks, democratic systems cost money. Elections, transparent administration and an effective legislative framework — all the requisites and accoutrements of democracy — cost money. An effective democratic system, which brings about social justice, development and equity, costs even more. Resources should be

devoted to programmes geared towards building national capacities, rather than merely on monitoring and administrative activities. But most importantly, we must address not only issues of form of democratic institutions, but also the broader issues of social justice and equity.

At the heart of a democratic order is the principle of rule of law. By the same token, an international system that is just and democratic must be one in which international law is respected. To violate that cardinal principle would mean that the legitimacy of the democratic system that is to be established is questionable. Recent events have demonstrated that outside intervention to establish a democratic system is fraught with danger and uncertainties. The importance that we accord to promoting democracy at the national level must be matched by ensuring democracy at the international level. Failure to do so will put into question the sincerity of those who only promote democracy at the national level.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that a democratic system that is sustainable must take into account national circumstances, provide for social inclusion and be supported by an enabling international environment. In this regard, we hope that the Malaysian experience for the last 46 years is of some use and relevance to those countries which are new and restored democracies.

Mr. Oyugi (Kenya): I thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the Assembly. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report A/58/392 on "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies".

Kenya appreciates the efforts of the United Nations system in recent years to support and give assistance on democracy and good governance. Indeed, over the past decade, the United Nations has increased its support for new and restored democracies in Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia. Many of those countries have emerged from civil war and other forms of conflicts. The increase in support is commendable and we urge the Secretary-General to quantify it and make it systematic.

The resolutions adopted during the recent Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 10 to 12 September 2003, were a clear indication of the desire by new and emerging democracies to forge new frontiers for democracy and good governance. The final report, in the form of a Declaration and Plan of Action, defined benchmarks for democratic governance and committed the 119 States which participated in the meeting to implement comprehensive plans at the national, regional and international levels.

For peace, stability and sustainable development to flourish, good governance is a prerequisite. This challenge is one that Kenya has taken seriously. The December 2002 elections in Kenya were an indication of the people's resolve to build a free and democratic country. During the elections, all citizens of Kenya were provided with the opportunity to have a voice in determining their government. This is strong evidence that Africans can and will embrace democracy and are ready to determine their own destiny.

Kenya believes in good-neighbourliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. We recognize the need to forge closer ties with our neighbours within the region and the world in general. At the regional level, Kenya is a member of many organizations including the East African Community, whose constitution encourages good governance and democracy. Kenya was also among the first African countries to accede to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) African Peer Review Mechanism. The goal of this Mechanism is to get African leaders to subject their Governments to examination by fellow African leaders in such priority areas as peace and security, democracy and political governance and economic corporate management.

We consciously entered into this innovative arrangement knowing that the process was meant to improve human rights standards, economic management, conflict resolution and, above all, democratic decision-making within the continent.

At the national level, the Government of Kenya is committed and has the political will to fight corruption so as to achieve zero tolerance for this scourge. The Head of State is personally leading the Government's efforts in the fight against corruption. To that end, the Government recently enacted the Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Act of 2003. The Act provides for the prevention, investigation and punishment of corruption, economic crimes and related offences, as well as the establishment of special anti-corruption courts.

The magistrates designated to head those special courts have already been appointed. The law replaces the Anti-Corruption Police Unit with the Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission, the latter having a wider mandate to investigate and prosecute corruption cases and to initiate and implement special anti-corruption programmes.

Further, pursuant to the law, the Kenya Anti-Corruption Advisory Board, comprised of Kenyans of high moral integrity, was recently commissioned to advise the Government on issues relating to corruption and to supervise the work of the Commission. The Act also provides for compensation and the recovery of improper benefits resulting from corruption or economic crime.

The Government of Kenya has also recently passed into law the Public Officer Ethics Act of 2003. The Act seeks to safeguard the ethics of public officials by providing a code of conduct aimed to ensure that public officials carry out their work with integrity and diligence. The law, among other things, makes it compulsory for all public officials to declare their income, assets and liabilities annually.

In that connection, Kenya warmly welcomes the adoption by this plenary only last Friday, 31 October 2003, of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. We look forward to its signing in Mexico later this year. Undoubtedly, the Convention will supplement our national efforts in the fight against corruption and strengthen the international community's global fight against corruption.

Kenya supports the Secretary-General's efforts in peace-building and peacekeeping. That contribution is borne out of the understanding that States emerging from conflicts need to establish necessary institutions but, above all, need to establish peace, as a major ingredient for democracy.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that democracy and good governance form the basis for a peaceful world. If those cardinal tenets are upheld, the United Nations will be able to devote more resources to its development agenda. Poverty, unemployment and social exclusion have been identified as threats to democracy. We call upon donors and international financial institutions to increase support to developing countries in order to enable them to enhance democracy and address the major socio-economic ills as part of the drive towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

We therefore support the suggestion of the Secretary-General that the General Assembly, at its current session, give support to the recommendations of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): May I congratulate you most warmly, Mr. President, on your skilful stewardship of our proceedings. The Secretary-General's very succinct report on this agenda item (A/58/392) reaffirms that the United Nations stands firm as a strong pillar of support to the ideal and institution of democracy worldwide. I place on record here our high commendations to the Government of Mongolia for successfully hosting the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies in Ulaanbaatar last September. Our commitment to the process was amply demonstrated by our representation at the ministerial level at the meeting.

I take the floor as the voice of a vibrant, pluralistic and liberal democratic society of 130 million people. We in Bangladesh enjoy, advocate and promote democracy and freedom. Democracy for us is the reflection of the will of the governed — the people — to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural ethos. It is our firm conviction that democracy is the best governance practice for ensuring fundamental freedoms and human rights. It upholds the rule of law, makes government accountable and makes decision-making transparent. It empowers people and prevents the abuse of power by authority through checks and balances. It guarantees equality, representation and the participation of all.

It is a democratic society that promotes genuine freedom of human thought and speech and fosters partnership between the Government and civil society. It is democratic polity that can best own its national policies to achieve poverty eradication through social inclusion and the people's ownership of the process. Democracy, education and economic emancipation help dispel extremism and violence, foster cultural harmony and tolerance and promote sustainable peace and development. These fundamental values are vital to the stability, progress and prosperity of all societies emerging from conflict, suppression or oppression.

One of the most profound changes in the post-cold-war era has been that more and more societies and peoples have overwhelmingly opted for a democratic form of governance. However, the greatest challenge to the consolidation of those new or restored democracies is not a political one but the lack of international support to sustain their socio-economic development and overcome the downside of globalization. A paradigm shift in institutional and behavioural patterns — inculcating a culture of democratic politics and practices — is vital to their success. Equally vital is the sustained socio-economic empowerment of their peoples, capacity-building for the liberalization of markets and buttressing trade as the engine of growth. Hard terrors such as terrorism, extremism and intolerance can threaten the fragile security and sovereignty of nascent democracies. Equally destabilizing can be soft terrors such as hunger, disease, privation and environmental degradation.

Today, Bangladesh is in the midst of tremendous societal transformations under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. Democracy, freedom, pluralism and liberalism are the ethos close to every Bangladeshi heart and are an integral part of our political culture. Our Constitution, embodying the principles and provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is the supreme law of the land, from which emanates all statutory and special laws for the protection of human rights and the fundamental freedoms of our people.

Gender justice, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment are at the heart of our democratic aspirations. Minorities and other vulnerable groups enjoy special rights with consistent political, social and economic support from the Government. Those elements have gone a long way towards containing extremist and irrational thought and action. They have helped to make moderation and tolerance the twin characteristics of Bangladeshi society.

We are convinced that, without people's effective participation, human rights — in particular the right to development — will remain unrealized. Through a mix of appropriate macroeconomic polices, the judicious use of external support and innovative home-grown ideas such as microcredit and primary education — formal and non-formal — we have made peace and development the twofold supreme objective of our nation.

As key to the success of our democratization process, we have institutionalized a neutral and transparent electoral process. A non-partisan caretaker Government oversees our parliamentary elections to ensure fairness and impartiality. A democratically elected Parliament, thriving with the representation of all major political parties, is at the centre of our national decision-making process. An independent law reform commission is dedicated to modernizing and harmonizing laws with international legal obligations, while rural courts have been established to decentralize justice.

A national human rights commission and an ombudsman's office are in the offing to enhance accountability of governance. Freedom of the press has been the hallmark of our democratic practices, while close development collaboration with a vibrant civil society has been a matter of national pride. Through our civil society practitioners, we endeavour to spread democratic values — such as women's empowerment — and socio-economic programmes — like microcredit and non-formal primary education — in many post-conflict societies in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Our armed forces impart those ideals as United Nations peacekeepers in distant parts of the world.

The twin challenges posed by globalization and international terrorism seriously undermine efforts in our countries to enjoy the fruits of democracy and liberty. While globalization offers significant opportunities, it also gives rise to inequalities, diminishing market access and causing economic stagnation. Terrorism, on the other hand, threatens democracy, human security and social harmony and breeds hatred. The success of our democracies, therefore, will depend largely on our ability to provide our peoples a secure and prosperous world where they can fully enjoy their freedom without any discrimination or deprivation. The fulfilment of commitments undertaken in the Millennium Declaration, at the Monterrey and Johannesburg summits and at other global conferences is critical to overcome these challenges.

As many of the nascent democracies march forward on the path of peace, stability and development, let us hope that critically needed international support will be forthcoming to complement their national efforts. The United Nations promotes the best of human endeavours. We fully

endorse the coherent and multidimensional support provided by the United Nations during the past years to many of those countries to consolidate the rule of law and to improve governance. United Nations assistance in electoral processes, post-conflict peacekeeping and peace-building, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and the strengthening of law enforcement, legal, judicial and human rights institutions in post-conflict societies is noteworthy. Bangladesh is proud to have been closely associated with those United Nations efforts worldwide.

The Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies provided an excellent opportunity to share national experiences in deepening the roots of democracy. The Ulaanbaatar Plan of Action is an important follow-up mechanism for all concerned to stay the course in promoting democracy globally, regionally and nationally. We must, however, recognize that democracy is an evolving process. It is not a panacea for all that is ill. It cannot be imposed or prescribed. Neither should it be restrained or constrained. Every nation enjoys its sovereign national ideals and its ethos for democracy and governance. These should be respected.

Let me conclude by reaffirming that we are ready to share our best practices in upholding the ideals of democracy, liberty and pluralism with societies enjoying new or restored democracies.

Mr. Mubarez (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today's meeting is taking place immediately after the holding of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, which demonstrated the commitment of the participating States to democracy as an ideal way to overcome the difficulties they encounter, both nationally and internationally. The outcomes of the Conference — particularly the Declaration and Plan of Action — provide criteria for the establishment of an agreed framework to evaluate the democratic process in those countries and outline actions aimed at achieving democratic government during the second stage.

We commend the Secretary-General for his report on this issue (A/58/392), which contains a detailed assessment of the Conference and its outcome. My delegation also commends the recommendations in the report that support the efforts of Member States. As a participant in the Conference, Yemen has always demonstrated the importance of cooperation among all Member States as a way to promote democracy, given that democracy is a choice for construction and development. Democracy, in our case, was an irreversible national decision and was synonymous with unity. Democracy was a sure guarantee of the continuity and strength of the unity of the State that was established on 29 May 1990. Realities have shown that the democratic process and commitment to its ideals have made us overcome the various challenges that we have faced in the last 13 years.

We are proud of what our country has already achieved in building a democracy, whether it be establishing democratic institutions or disseminating democratic concepts. We witness that ongoing democratic process through the media, with their various voices and opinions, and the participation of civil society and political parties and parliamentary and presidential elections.

The Ulaanbaatar Conference considered all the issues being addressed by new or restored democracies and the principles of democratic governance have been detailed and refined. Moreover, the parliamentary and civil society forums demonstrated the commitment of their States to greater participation in the democratic process, and its deliberations and statements revealed additional challenges facing us in the implementation of democracy in various situations.

We strove to reach consensus on the Declaration and Plan of Action and find ways for democracies to achieve peace, social progress and development. Among these ways are the following. First, democracy is a style, a means and not an end in itself — a means for achieving social peace, stability and well-being. As such, it can develop according to the characteristics, priorities and circumstances of a given society. Consequently, democracy is not one single form and cannot be applied as a uniform formula. Secondly, the challenges that the new and restored democracies face differ greatly, but the biggest challenge is development in its universal sense.

Political stability is vital for democracy and economic growth. We need to encourage participation and eliminate all feelings of injustice, oppression and marginalization. That is the best way to prevent all destructive acts, such as terrorism and coups d'état.

Thirdly, my country reaffirms the importance of international cooperation to support new and restored democracies and their efforts for democratic

development. Needless to say, spreading and implementing democratic principles helps further the rational process of decision-making. Democracy promotes healthy, peaceful, balanced relations of mutual respect between States. No one can deny that democratic forums for expressing public opinion and contributing to general policies make an important contribution to meeting various challenges.

The Fifth International Conference emphasized the importance of civil society's role in the democratic process. We believe it is important to create a regional association bringing together civil society organizations. The exchange of ideas and experiences will have positive results for all, especially in our Arab region, where countries share a similar political, historical and cultural experience.

In conclusion, we are satisfied with the Plan of Action put forward by the Fifth International Conference. We support it and believe that it should be implemented, no matter how ambitious it might appear. Its implementation will further our common aspirations to strengthen democracy, not only in the relationship between the governed and the governing, but also in relationships among all human beings.

Mr. Sevilla Somoza (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour to speak on behalf of the countries of the Central American Integration System, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Dominican Republic and my own country, Nicaragua. I congratulate you, Mr. President, on your outstanding work as you preside over the work of this session of the General Assembly.

First, I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the question under consideration, contained in document A/58/392. We also thank the Government of Mongolia and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, Mr. Luvsangiin Erdenechuluun, President of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, for the excellent manner in which the Conference was conducted, in Ulaanbaatar from 10 to 12 September this year.

I wish to underline the enormous growth of the movement of new and restored democracies over the 15 years since the first Conference in Manila, which was attended by only 13 States. Participation at the Managua Conference increased to 77 States, and an unprecedented 119 States attended the Fifth Conference. That gives us an idea of the importance Governments the world over attach to democracy.

The Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies established an ambitious follow-up plan for the implementation of its recommendations at the national, regional and international levels and provided for the decisive role in future work of the follow-up mechanism established at the third Conference in Bucharest.

The Declaration of Ulaanbaatar contains a set of recommendations on democracy, good governance and civil society. It covers a set of steps for Governments to follow with respect to checks and balances on authority in order to prevent abuse and strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights, equality of men and women and respect for the rule of law. The Declaration also calls for international compliance with international instruments for human rights and humanitarian law.

Government actions are legitimate when they are based on the will of the citizens, seek their active participation, foster human security and provide opportunities to express dissent by non-violent means.

The Declaration also condemns all acts of terrorism, recommends strengthening international efforts to combat international terrorism and underlines the need to reinforce international cooperation to prevent and combat terrorism, including measures to alleviate factors fostering and supporting extremism and violence.

Democracy must be a source for unity, not for division. Because of its evolving nature, we cannot expect the implementation of democracy to take place in conformity with a universal model. However, every nation has the responsibility to act according to a set of shared common values, such as freedom of representation, respect for human rights and respect for the principles contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Declaration of Ulaanbaatar supports six basic principles of democracy, which are to be applied in accordance with international and national plans of action adopted at the Conference. Those principles include a set of norms to ensure their implementation.

We, the countries of the Central American Integration System wish to underline the importance of the United Nations system's support for the countries

belonging to the movement of new or restored democracies in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa, many of which have recently emerged from civil war or internal conflict. The assistance of the United Nations and donor countries encompasses various aspects, from the reform of the State and its institutions, with particular emphasis on the holding of free elections and respect for human rights, to the construction of a dynamic civil society based on freedom of expression and organization and a political culture encouraging participation and political debate.

The link between democracy and development has been given broad recognition through time. The march of democracy, just like the reduction of poverty, has been a long process. But we believe that democracy must be a tool for the reduction of poverty, and this is why we urge all the nations of the world to endeavour to reach the goals of the Millennium Declaration.

One question of particular concern to the developing countries is the link between globalization and democratization, because globalization, while providing new opportunities, also has negative effects that are especially magnified in the poorest countries. It is worrisome that in the past 10 years, the share of global wealth that corresponds to the poorest fifth of the world's population has declined from 2.3 per cent to 1.4 per cent of total global wealth. From a political standpoint, we are concerned about the effects of globalization on the sovereignty of States, on democracy and on developing countries' citizens.

Democracy is a process of painstaking and constant effort and constitutes the form of government that, to date, has best responded to the needs of peoples and that most adequately helps fulfil their development potential. This is why we must seek a new regulatory framework for economic relations that mitigates the negative effects of globalization on the developing countries. This would help us avoid the difficulties and obstacles that weaken the consolidation of democratic processes.

In spite of all the adversities on the road to democracy, we know that we are not alone in our struggle. Let us be guided by our shared objective of good governance in the twenty-first century, ensuring that by exercising democracy we can build a better world.

Mr. Gatan (Philippines): The agenda item before us has always been of special importance to the Philippines, not only because it was the first country to organize and host the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, but, more importantly, because it recognizes that a lack of external support for the new and restored democracies can aggravate the continuing threats of destabilization that face them.

My delegation is heartened to note that, from the handful of countries that participated in the Conference in Manila in June 1988, the number of participants has increased to 119 countries at the Conference held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, last September. The Conference was also attended by a number of United Nations agencies, as well as non-governmental groups.

This universal participation in the Conference attests to the growing importance the international community has given to promoting and consolidating new or restored democracies. We therefore commend the Government and the people of Mongolia for the successful management of the Fifth Conference, which was marked by two parallel events: the civil society conferences and the conferences of the international parliamentarians.

My delegation further commends the Government of Mongolia for bringing together partners from civil society at the Fifth International Conference. My delegation is likewise pleased by the positive report of the Secretary-General (A/58/392) on the recently concluded Conference and its themes: democracy, good governance and civil society.

It may be recalled that the origin of this consultative process among new or restored democracies was precipitated by the need to share experiences in the management of Governments heretofore inexperienced in democratic processes with fledgling democratic institutions.

As the consultative process progressed, until the last Conference in Mongolia, like-minded countries have realized that self-help is not sufficient to ensure their long-term stability. The Ulaanbaatar Conference has demonstrated the urgency of involving non-governmental partners to strengthen new or restored democratic Governments. Civil society, international parliamentarians, donor Governments and the United Nations system are indeed vital partners in this collective endeavour.

The Philippines strongly endorses the adoption by consensus of the draft resolution to be presented by

Mongolia under agenda item 20. As it has done in the past, it will again sponsor this draft. As spelled out in the operative part of the draft resolution, the Philippines will again invite the Secretary-General to examine options for strengthening the support provided by the United Nations system to the efforts of Member States to consolidate democracy, including by setting up a working group to explore ways to make the Conference and its follow-up more effective and efficient.

In conclusion, conferences may become academic exercises if their recommendations are not acted upon or if their agreed commitments not carried out. In this light, my delegation welcomes the initiative mentioned earlier by His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia for inter-conference follow-up activities, in which the Philippines will actively participate.

It would also be extremely useful if the outcome of the Ulaanbaatar Conference, consisting of the Ulaanbaatar Declaration and Plan of Action on Democracy, Good Governance and Civil Society, could be disseminated to Governments and concerned sectors of civil society through the existing information and communication resources of the United Nations.

Mr. Mekprayoonthong (Thailand): My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies. We have learned with appreciation that the support provided has been increased over the years. This necessary support has contributed to the promotion of the core values of democracy, good governance, the rule of law, accountability and participation of the people at the national, regional and international levels.

We also acknowledge with appreciation the increasingly important role of the United Nations in providing assistance to States, especially in the area of electoral processes and institution-building in post-conflict situations.

My delegation wishes to express our appreciation to the host Government of Mongolia for its warm hospitality accorded to delegations participating in the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Ulaanbaatar from 10 to 12 September 2003. We wish also to commend the Government of Mongolia for its excellent organization of the Conference.

The fact that the Conference attracted 119 participating countries and a large number of representatives of civil society as well as parliamentarians proves that democracy is indeed the most widely accepted form of governance for guaranteeing an inclusive and participatory society which promotes and protects the human rights and fundamental freedoms of peoples.

Thailand is among the 30-odd countries that had ministerial-level representation at the Fifth International Conference. The President of the Thai Parliament also led a group of parliamentarians who participated in the Parliamentary Forum, held in parallel with the Conference. We believe that, considering the particularities inherent in different societies, it would be beneficial for countries to share best practices in order to enrich the democratization process. My delegation therefore finds the innovations proposed by both the Parliamentary Forum and the interactive civil society forum highly constructive, especially in promoting greater understanding and partnership among Governments, parliaments, civil society and the United Nations system. We support the continuation of those innovative arrangements at future Conferences.

My delegation believes that democracy is only a means to an end — the well-being of our peoples. The consolidation of democracy would have a direct impact on the promotion of human rights and of human security for peoples, which would enable them to achieve both freedom from want and freedom from fear.

Good governance is an essential element of a democratic society. All sectors of society should strive to cultivate a culture of accountability, transparency and respect for the rule of law in all their undertakings.

Based on our experience, the Thai Government places a strong emphasis on the "outside-in" approach in its policy formulation and implementation. That citizen-centred approach integrates the wishes of the people "outside" the Government into its policy platform and the implementation thereof. Moreover, it is consistent with our national economic and social development policies, which place people at the centre of development. Transparency and an approach that encourages participation by the people have proved

effective in better serving the interests and needs of the people, thereby contributing to the country's economic prosperity and social stability.

At the international level, Thailand has been actively involved in laying a strong foundation for a democracy based on a pluralistic political system by playing host to the Second International Conference of Asian Political Parties, held in Bangkok in November 2002. The Conference successfully brought together both government and opposition parties from most Asian countries to share their views, experiences and best practices in addressing the needs of peoples.

My delegation attaches great importance to the final report, Declaration and Plan of Action which were adopted by consensus during the Fifth International Conference. We are fully committed to implementing the measures and actions contained in the Declaration and the Plan of Action.

As the promotion of democratization and good governance would reinforce national efforts towards social and economic development and contribute to international peace, security and stability, it is crucial for all parties concerned to devote particular attention and redouble their efforts to follow up on what was agreed by consensus at the Fifth International Conference.

Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan): My delegation attaches great importance to the agenda item under consideration today. Since the First International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held at Manila, a unique and substantive contribution has been made towards the building of democratic societies. Kazakhstan commends the Governments of Benin, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Romania and the Philippines for having organized the International Conferences on New or Restored Democracies. Those forums have provided the opportunity for an extensive exchange of views and have laid the groundwork for the further consolidation of new or restored democracies.

Kazakhstan believes that peace, democracy and development are fundamentally linked, and that the respect of human rights, equality between men and women, and the fight against all forms of discrimination are inalienable elements of democracy. My delegation fully supports the view expressed by other delegations that there is no alternative to democracy if the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are to be maintained.

We thank the Government of Mongolia for its successful hosting of the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies in Ulaanbaatar from 10 to 12 September 2003. The wide, high-level representation at that Conference demonstrated the global commitment to promote the democratization process at the national, regional and international levels.

This is clear evidence of the aspiration of all peoples to an international order which is based on the principles of the United Nations Charter. We hope that the General Assembly will give its support to the recommendations of the Fifth International Conference in order further to consolidate democracy nationally, regionally and internationally.

We wish to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report (A/58/392), which provides a comprehensive overview of the efforts of the United Nations system in that field. We recognize the multifaceted assistance provided by the United Nations to new or restored democracies.

For a number of years the Organization has been helping to build and reform national institutions and to strengthen the capacity of legislatures in new or restored democracies. Many activities have been carried out by the United Nations in the area of State reform, focusing on human rights protection. Attention also has been given to democracy as a key component of United Nations peace missions.

However, despite the encouraging efforts made in that field, we are facing new challenges in promoting democracy worldwide. The terrorist attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August 2003 has once again demonstrated how vulnerable and fragile the world is.

We believe that the United Nations must play an effective role in promoting and strengthening democracies worldwide and in creating a security environment for democracies in which peace, prosperity and sustainable development are guaranteed.

In the 12 years of Kazakhstan's independence, some dramatic changes have taken place. Accomplishments in economic and political areas determine the present and future of our State. But the greatest accomplishment has been in the changed mentality of people who have embraced democratic

reforms, have put their trust in those reforms and have become their active promoters.

Unlike many other countries where democracy has been built on the basis of a developed civil society, we are building, all at once, democracy, civil society and the State. Along with economic reforms, we have been changing the political system. The role of civil society institutions has been enhanced considerably. Political parties and movements and independent media have become important actors in the social life of our country.

Activities of non-governmental organizations to promote democratic principles in society deserve special mention. To a large extent, their activities contribute to the promotion of liberal values, improved political education of the population and the development of democracy. International and foreign organizations that supported Kazakhstan during the difficult early years of our independence and continue to support it now should be given a lot of credit.

Kazakhstan has been implementing a democratization programme to ensure full respect of human rights and personal freedoms and prevent any forms of discrimination. A permanent conference to draft proposals on further democratization and development of civil society has contributed to the enhancement of democratic processes in the country.

To find the right balance in the relationship between institutions of State power and the individual, an office of Ombudsman was established in Kazakhstan. In other words, liberal reforms and democratic processes in Kazakhstan have become irreversible. The political course of our country is well-defined and clear: sustained growth of the market economy, internal stability, democracy and the rule of law.

We will be able to achieve our strategic objectives along the road to the prosperity of our country and well-being of our people only through joint and well-focused efforts based on a continued dialogue between all members of society enjoying equal rights.

The United Nations system provides an excellent opportunity for Member States to work together in creating a genuine democratic culture. Kazakhstan is dedicated to a coordinated strategy of the United Nations for promoting democracy, development and peace and stands ready to contribute to this process.

Mr. Requeijo Gual (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, we want to express our thanks to and congratulate the Government of Mongolia for having organized the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies and for its endeavour to ensure the broadest possible participation in that event. It was Mongolia's intention to organize a pluralistic, inclusive and participatory event and this is why an unprecedented number of States attended in Ulaanbaatar — 119 in all. It is a fact that this movement has been gaining in maturity. Its main accomplishment has been its increasingly inclusive nature, making it very different from other processes of dubious origin that are selective and exclusive in nature.

The movement of new or restored democracies has not endeavoured to impose any dogma or single vision of democracy. On the contrary, it has been a place to meet for debate and reflection on a topic that, since the days of ancient Greece, has aroused the interest of men and women.

The Ulaanbaatar Conference discussed, inter alia, two topics of particular importance and timeliness — unilateralism as a threat to democracy and the oligopolistic control of the information media. The Conference discussed the appropriateness of the establishment of an alliance among Governments, civil society and the United Nations to counteract any new tendency towards unilateralism. There is no task more urgent or more important than the democratization of international relations if we really want to help the efforts of many peoples to consolidate their democratic systems.

The movement of the so-called new or restored democracies can be an opportunity for an exchange of views and to support the efforts of many peoples to consolidate their democratic systems, if broad participation and a plurality of viewpoints in the debate on democracy is ensured, and if unrestricted respect for the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter is preserved.

As Cuba sees it, the very essence of democracy is the power of the people. This encompasses the exercise of authority and decision-making in the political sphere, as well as in the economic, social and cultural spheres. Nonetheless, at the international level there

has been a strong attempt to establish a single pattern of democracy and governance. The so-called bourgeois liberal democracy that would seem to have functioned, with grave limitations, in the Western countries, has proven its inoperability in other contexts. It would not be possible to successfully defend the hypothesis of its universal superiority. Today, as in the times of the greatest obscurantism in the history of humankind, an attempt is being made to condemn and punish all of those who will not tolerate and who dissent from its dogmas. In attempts to impose and restrict civil and political rights as the foundations of democracy, it has been forgotten that democracy is, first and foremost, government by the people, for the people and of the people. Democracy means real and daily participation in the exercise of power and in decision-making in all spheres of society. It cannot exist without freedom and without participation of the people, without social justice, without individual and collective well-being or without human solidarity. Sovereignty resides in the people and without national independence there is no sovereignty. Without the exercise of economic and social rights, there can be no democracy. A genuine democracy should not institutionalize the defence of the wealthiest and the most privileged to the detriment of those who are most in need.

A multi-party system does not mean democracy, nor does democracy require, as a prerequisite, the existence of a multi-party system. There are quite a few cases where political parties abound, and yet there is no democracy and no participation by the people — where abstention is the main elector. In such a model, patronage, tyranny, vote-buying, electoral fraud, corruption, profiteering and favouritism, among other evils, have spread.

Within the industrialized and wealthy world, there are many citizens who call into question the model of liberal democracy that some wish to impose. They feel they have no participation in the decision-making processes, that they are manipulated by campaigns and by the communications media, and that the model is elitist and the political parties and politicians are of poor calibre and do not fulfil their electoral promises.

We are also concerned about the growing limitations that are being imposed on the exercise of the most fundamental civil and political rights of a large group of countries of the first world under the pretext that these are part of the fight against terrorism. This was a particularly important concern in the framework of the Conference.

Cuba is proud that it has a profoundly popular and participatory democracy, without electoral parties as political intermediaries. It is a democracy in which the people exercise power and in which individual and collective well-being and solidarity are fundamental. In my country, governmental institutions were established with the broadest possible popular participation and control. Our own experience is the result of our history.

In Cuba all citizens over the age of 16 have the right to vote and thus to elect and be elected to office. The nomination of candidates is made directly by the voters in public assemblies instead of through political parties. There are no discriminatory million-dollar, defamatory, manipulated electoral campaigns. There is total honesty and transparency in elections, and this includes the public tallying of votes, with the possible participation of the national and foreign press, of diplomats, tourists and whoever wishes to observe. All those elected must be elected by a majority. Elections are free, equal and secret. All representatives of the State are elected for renewable terms. All those elected are held accountable for their actions, and can be recalled at any time. Deputies and delegates earn no salaries. Historically, as much as 95 per cent of the electorate have participated in elections.

On a final note, we must observe that the limitations, problems and challenges of democracy are present in one form or another in both the North and in the South.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

United Nations A/58/PV.58

General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

58th plenary meeting
Thursday, 6 November 2003, 11.30 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

Agenda item 22 (*continued*)

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/260 and Add.1)

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): At the outset, allow me to commend the Secretary-General's report (A/58/260) on assistance in mine action, which constitutes an important element of a more systematic and coordinated approach to the subject. We also welcome the outcome of the fifth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, which was held in September in Bangkok and which reaffirmed an unwavering commitment to the total eradication of anti-personnel mines and to overcoming the insidious and inhumane effects of those deadly weapons.

Croatia's statement will be circulated in the General Assembly Hall. Let me therefore just emphasize a few of the most important points it contains.

Croatia is pleased with the progress the Convention has made on the road to universalization. In our opinion, it has succeeded in creating a new international norm, even though not a small number of States, with hundreds of millions of landmines, remain beyond the reach of the Convention. As one of the original 40 countries whose signature and ratification brought the Ottawa Convention into force, Croatia is pleased that the rate of ratification has not slowed down. We welcome the 10 new countries that ratified the Convention in 2003.

On the substantive level, we believe that the extensive debate in recent months about the reform of the Convention is crucial to the future development of mine action in general, and to the Convention in particular. We welcome the ongoing consultations taking place concerning possible changes to the inner structure of the Convention, including regarding the number and duration of annual meetings of States parties and of intersessional meetings.

The progress made in fulfilling the four goals of the Ottawa Convention has been tangible but uneven. There have been marked advances in the destruction of mines stored in stockpiles and in mine clearance of national territories contaminated with mines. However, Croatia believes that assistance in the rehabilitation of mine victims needs more energy and engagement on the international level so that the timetables set by the Convention can actually be implemented. Furthermore, the fact that financial assistance to the victims of mines has remained constant over the previous two years, while the total number of those injured by anti-personnel mines has increased, is a cause for grave concern.

Croatia is determined to achieve all the goals of the Convention. In its new position as co-Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and

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Socio-Economic Reintegration. Croatia wishes to reaffirm that all actors engaged in mine action share the responsibility to ensure all necessary support — institutional and financial, symbolic and substantive — for the full rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors of landmines.

On the national level, Croatia has experienced a 40 per cent decrease in the number of mine victims. While every mine victim is a tragedy, the fact that Croatia registered only six incidents this year is persuasive evidence of the success of the broad media campaign launched by the Government and of the rigorous marking and fencing of areas suspected of containing mines. In that regard, we are pleased to see the establishment of the South-East European Regional Centre for Psychosocial Rehabilitation, which is based in the town of Rovinj, Croatia. In addition to the relevant Croatian ministries and the county of Istria, funds have also been pledged by Canada, Norway, Japan and the United States Department of State, to whom we express our sincere gratitude.

Croatia is still a mine-affected State, although mine contamination is a gradually decreasing problem. We believe that through the joint efforts of government authorities and numerous hard-working personnel involved in mine action on the ground, as well as generous international assistance, Croatia should be free of mines by 2009. Under the leadership of the Croatian Mine Action Centre, approximately one quarter of the areas in Croatia suspected of containing mines had been cleared of mines by October 2003. In that endeavour, the great majority of funding — approximately 85 per cent — was secured by the Croatian Government. In addition, we have received valuable support and considerable financial assistance from numerous States, institutions, organizations and individuals.

Croatia particularly encourages the use of the matching-funds mechanism of the international Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action — whose headquarters are in Ljubljana, Slovenia — with the continuous allocation of funds provided by the United States Government. As the third largest donor to the Trust Fund, we welcome its transparent, tailor-made and efficient operations. However, we have expressed dissatisfaction with the low inflow of donor contributions this year, which has resulted in an increased burden on the State budget. Stronger donor assistance would significantly contribute to the early completion of the mine clearance process in Croatia and help to free up the Government's resources, which are needed for activities conducive to economic development.

Croatia recognizes and values the importance of expert education and training for all persons engaged in mine clearance. Bearing that in mind, allow me to inform the Assembly that on 15 October 2003, the Mine Action Academy for international studies in humanitarian mine clearance was established at the Polytechnic College of Velika Gorica, a town near Zagreb.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Croatia' s offer to host the first meeting of the States parties to the Ottawa Convention, directly following the 2004 Nairobi review conference. That will be a unique opportunity to organize for the first time a meeting of States parties in South-East Europe, a region still heavily contaminated with anti-personnel mines that has never had an opportunity to host such a conference.

Mr. Chaimongkol (Thailand): The current report card on the global effort to achieve the goal of a mine-free world shows mixed results. On the one hand, the report of the Secretary-General entitled "United Nations mine action: a strategy for 2001-2005" (A/58/260/Add.1) refers to significant progress since 1993 towards creating an environment free from the threat of landmines. The increase in the number of States parties to both the Mine Ban Convention and the Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons have resulted in a dramatic decline in the production, transfer, stockpiling and use of landmines.

On the other hand, the 2003 report of Landmine Monitor found that new landmine casualties have been reported in 65 countries — up from 61 countries listed in last year's document. The estimates are that there still are from 15,000 to 20,000 new casualties from landmines and unexploded ordnance each year, with 11,700 new casualties having been identified in 2002.

The fact remains that landmines continue to threaten human security in all regions of the world. In addition to the toll in human lives, landmines also pose obstacles to development and people-to-people contacts. The question is one of how we can most effectively meet the global challenge posed by landmines. The threat to human security posed by the landmines should be addressed in an integrated

manner, so as to take into account all aspects of the problem, namely, mine awareness, mine clearance, victim assistance, stockpile-destruction and universal adherence to the Mine Ban Convention.

Thailand certainly subscribes to the view that the problem posed by landmines can best be dealt with from the humanitarian perspective. The indiscriminate pain and suffering caused by landmines is universally recognized, as is the need to ameliorate such suffering through effective victim assistance and mine-removal programmes. We therefore welcome and support the emphasis on the humanitarian imperative as one of the key principles and core values of the revised United Nations mine action strategy for 2001-2005.

Meeting such immense humanitarian concerns, however, is a burden no one State or group of States can manage alone. International support and cooperation is therefore necessary to make substantive progress in solving the landmine problem, particularly in mine-affected developing States. Partnerships need to be created at all levels to enhance national, regional and global capacities to address this issue.

In September of this year, Thailand was honoured to host in Bangkok the fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention, the first Meeting to be held in Asia. Over 600 representatives of both States parties and non-State parties participated in the Meeting, many from countries that had never attended such meetings before. The Bangkok Declaration highlighted the serious threat posed by landmines to human security and its devastating humanitarian impacts. The Declaration adopted at the Meeting also called on States parties to pursue with renewed vigour efforts to clear mined areas, assist victims, destroy stockpiled mines and promote universal adherence to the Convention.

As a follow-up to the Meeting, Thailand introduced a draft resolution on the implementation of the Mine Ban Convention in the First Committee that was adopted by an overwhelming majority and that had a record number of 145 sponsors. As President of the fifth Meeting of States Parties, Thailand will continue to work closely with all concerned States until the First Review Conference is held, in November 2004, to make further progress towards the goals and objectives of the Mine Ban Convention.

For our part, we are making strenuous efforts to meet the obligations set out in the Mine Ban Convention. Earlier this year, Thailand was pleased to announce that it had completed the destruction of its stockpile of anti-personnel mines on 24 April. While that was a welcome achievement in itself, the major hurdle still lies ahead, namely, mine clearance on the ground.

Despite efforts by the Thailand Mine Action Centre, which is the national focal point for mine action, according to a level-one survey, only 0.87 square kilometres out of a total of 2,556.7 square kilometres — or 0.03 per cent of the mine-infested area — have been demined thus far. Much work remains ahead, and much assistance will therefore be required to complete that task by 2009, as required by the Convention.

As mine action is a complex and comprehensive undertaking, building partnerships at all levels is a must. Effective partnerships need to be fostered at the national level between all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society, the private sector and, of course, the victims and their families. For example, in Thailand the Mine Action Centre is working in partnership with all other relevant stakeholders, including such non-governmental organizations as the Thailand Campaign to Ban Landmines. Many activities, particularly in the promotion of public awareness, are spearheaded by local non-governmental organizations, with the support of the Government and local businesses. Partnerships among and between Governments, including both States parties and non-State parties to the Mine Ban Convention, as well as with international organizations, should be encouraged and pursued with equal vigour.

Again, with regard to Thailand's example, we enjoy very productive partnerships with Norway through the Norwegian People's Aid, the United Kingdom and the United States, in initiating the level one landmine impact survey. Thailand also enjoys a strong partnership with the United States, particularly with regard to training, equipment and general capacity-building for various mine action units. Furthermore, Thailand is also exploring partnerships with China in mine action. We also appreciate the assistance provided by the United Nations Development Programme, which is supported by Japan through the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action. Thailand also wishes to register its appreciation to the United Nations Mine Action Service and all other United Nations agencies

involved in assistance in mine action throughout the world.

Thailand itself is providing assistance in mine action to other developing countries, in the spirit of South-South cooperation. Mine clearance instructors were provided to Sri Lanka to help train trainers. Thailand is also working with other countries, such as Slovakia, to explore the possibilities of promoting trilateral cooperation for the benefit of third countries. As a troop-contributing country to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Thailand also has provided mine action assistance through its troops to Cambodia and Timor-Leste.

Much of the assistance for mine action earmarked for mine-affected developing States comes from humanitarian assistance. The report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action (A/58/260) confirms that donors continue to fund mine action primarily from humanitarian or emergency budget lines. That approach should continue. There is a danger that if assistance in mine action is to be drawn from development assistance programmes, developing States may not always be willing to receive assistance in such form. That certainly would not help our cause of mobilizing all States, particularly mine-affected developing States in need of assistance, to undertake effective mine action on a sustained basis. It is therefore necessary to exercise prudence and to carefully examine the implications from all angles, taking into account the views of developing countries. Our initial view is that funds for mine action programmes should be provided over and above development assistance.

Finally, I would like to say a word on the United Nations revised mine action strategy for 2001-2005. We commend the Secretary-General for coming up with a revised strategy that takes into account the views of Member States on this important issue. Many of the key elements for effective mine action and assistance in mine action are reflected in the Secretary-General's report, which will help to guide our work during the several years ahead.

Mr. Zulu Kilo-Abi (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I am pleased, as we address agenda item 22, entitled "Assistance in mine action", to express, on behalf of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his detailed report (A/58/260) on the subject of mine action and the progress achieved with regard to the six goals and strategic objectives of the United Nations mine action strategy.

As we all know, while being a global scourge and a danger that claims numerous innocent civilians — especially in rural areas — anti-personnel mines are above all an ongoing obstacle to the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes, to humanitarian assistance operations, to reconstruction and economic development and to the re-establishment of normal social conditions. In short, due to the terror they inflict, anti-personnel mines prevent human beings from living normally and deprives them of any chance of benefiting from their land after a conflict.

Let us recall that the General Assembly, after acknowledging the scope of the harm caused to mankind by landmines and unexploded ordnance, requested all Member States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to undertake activities — in accordance with article 6 of, and in cooperation with States parties to, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction — in the areas of raising public awareness about the danger posed by landmines, training, detection, mine clearance and assistance to victims. We should also recall that the Convention now enjoys the active support of 141 States. In that connection, the fifth Meeting of States Parties, which was held in Bangkok from 15 to 19 September, emphasized that, in order to achieve the ideal of a world free from landmines, States parties should respect their obligations vis-à-vis the destruction of all stockpiled mines, the clearance of mined areas and universal adherence to the Ottawa Convention. My delegation would now like to launch an urgent appeal to Member States that have not yet done so to do all they can to accede to the Mine Ban Convention as soon as possible.

As of 1 November 2002, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a State party to the Ottawa Convention. On 30 April 2003, my country submitted its first report to the Secretary-General under article 7 of the Convention. We are now continuing to identify all of our stockpiled anti-personnel mines, with a view to their destruction, as well as the mined areas in the whole of our territory.

Although it is true that concrete progress has been made to date, it is also true that many challenges remain. In addressing those challenges, it should be recalled that for the Democratic Republic of the Congo it is important that there be collective awareness of the reality and scope of the problem posed by the increased existence of mines and unexploded ordnance on our territory.

As everyone is aware, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is emerging from a particularly difficult war that has lasted for over five years. That deadly war brought together numerous ruthless armies in the field and claimed 3.5 million lives. Although my country is not among the countries most affected by anti-personnel mines, we must nevertheless realize that while are is still incomplete, many people are injured and maimed as a result of accidents caused by landmines. That problem serves to impose an additional burden on the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who have already been severely challenged by many years of war.

As the Secretary-General rightly pointed out in his report on special assistance for the economic recovery and reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (A/58/273), given widespread poverty and an economy that has been bled dry, addressing financial needs is crucial to dealing with the issue of anti-personnel mines. At the moment, the real, most urgent needs include, first, legal assistance; secondly, the financial, technological, technical and human resources needed to draft and implement a mine action programme that establishes, among other things, priorities with regard to emergencies, medical care, physical rehabilitation through the use of prosthesis and social and psychological care for victims of mines and unexploded ordnance; thirdly, support for the preparation and execution of operations to destroy stockpiled anti-personnel mines; and, fourthly, the establishment and initial training of a national mine clearance capacity that can operate throughout the entire country.

As the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo rightly stated before the General Assembly, given the many challenges we face in the post-conflict Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is crucial for the international community to be more involved in addressing all these concerns in the relevant provisions of the draft resolution being negotiated with regard to special assistance for the economic recovery and reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Before concluding, my delegation would like to avail itself of the opportunity presented by this very important meeting to thank and congratulate the United Nations Mine Action Service for its remarkable mine action efforts, and in particular for its ongoing support for the Mine Action Centre in our country through the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That support makes it possible for my country to properly control the problem of landmines. We also very much appreciate the assistance of those who provide funds and of governmental and non-governmental organizations. That assistance has made it possible to speed up the process of raising public awareness with regard to the issue of anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance, both in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and throughout the world.

In order to completely free the world from landmines, my country ardently wishes to see multilateral consensus develop in the framework of the Ottawa Convention with regard to the issue of mine action and ending the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): Allow me, at the outset, to express, on behalf of the delegation of Eritrea, our appreciation and gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report (A/589/260) on assistance in mine action. The Eritrean delegation considers that document to be comprehensive and balanced. It also brings into focus the dangers posed to all peoples by those infernal weapons.

It is sad to note that landmines and unexploded ordnance continue to be a major threat to the lives of millions in developing countries. The Horn of Africa is one of the most seriously affected regions in the world. In Eritrea almost 1,200 of its 3,461 communities — about one third of the country — is contaminated. The hardest hit are rural populations, pastoralists and internally displaced persons. Landmines and unexploded ordnance have also been a bane on the implementation of socio-economic development programmes.

Eritreans recognize, through the bitter experience of a 30-year-old liberation struggle, and two and a half years of defending the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of their country, that landmines are the source

of suffering and pain to many innocent civilians, especially the vulnerable members of society. The diverse, scarce resources from development activities constitute major threats to political stability and prevent the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes to pursue their previous productive lives, especially in the rural areas.

During the first war of independence, more than 1 million landmines and unexploded ordnance were planted extensively in all the regions of the country, especially in rural farmlands, near sources of water and roadways. During the second war, the enemy planted even more landmines in two and a half years than during the 30-years war in a much smaller area, thus adding to Eritrea's immense landmine problems. To date, there are an estimated 1.5 million to 1.6 million mines, and about 300,000 unexploded landmines in the country. In a country with a population of 3.6 million, it means there is one landmine for every three persons.

Since 1973, between 50,000 and 80,000 people have been victims of these weapons, more than 2,000 have suffered between 1991 and 1993, while police authorities have registered about 500 victims between 1994 and 1999. The problem was compounded by the absence of information. If the occupation forces left no maps after their defeat, the latest aggressor refused for a long time to make the maps in its possession available to the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), as required by the Algiers peace agreements. When it finally did submit maps, they were functionally useless. Most of the new landmines and minefields are located near population areas. This is creating serious problems and routinely inflicting casualties on people and animals alike. The continued travails of the landmines and unexploded ordnance, coupled with Ethiopia's lack of cooperation with the Boundary Commission and culminating in its repudiation of the peace agreements, is subverting all diplomatic efforts being made to ensure a successful execution of the peace agreements, to establish peaceful relations between the two countries and to create the first essential steps for regional peace.

Eritrea is committed to the total elimination of anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance because it is convinced that it is an essential measure that must be taken to ensure the return to normalcy in the lives of our people and the people of the region. To this end, it endorses the international objective of a year of victims, and is prepared to join all international and regional efforts that help in the removal of the threat caused by these infernal weapons.

Eritrea acceded to the anti-mine Convention only recently. Yet, being aware of the devastating effects of these evil weapons, it had, even during the liberation struggle and long before the adoption of the Convention, unilaterally practised the self-restraint measures being advocated by the Convention and other instruments. This can be confirmed by many non-governmental organizations that had visited the liberated areas during the first war. In any case, Eritrea has consistently voted for all anti-mine resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 54/54 B of December 1999. Eritrea also acknowledges the importance of international and regional coordination in mine-clearing activities without, however, impinging on the decision-making powers of the Eritrean Government. It, therefore, finds no problem in endorsing not only the provisions of the Ottawa Convention, but also the principles, objectives, programme function, standards and criteria set up by several follow-up meetings to the Ottawa Conference.

Eritrea embarked on a mine-clearing mission immediately after its liberation in 1991, that is, two years before its official recognition as a sovereign State. In 1996, the Government established a national mine clearance centre operated by the Minister of Defence, and consisting of a command unit, a historical research department, a mine clearance training centre and one company of mine clearance personnel consisting of 80 persons. The task was challenging and dangerous for a new country, while resources were scant. It was also time-consuming and very expensive, yet the operation was going smoothly until the new Ethiopian aggression in 1998. Engineers of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Army cleared an estimated 450,000 anti-personnel and 15,000 anti-tank mines after liberation in 1991. The mine clearance centre received expert assistance from a United States mine action training team which helped it to plan, organize, train and resource its humanitarian mine clearance operations, and more particularly, to develop a meaningful infrastructure capable of succeeding on its own. The United States military bilateral agreement ended in 1998.

True to its hallowed tradition of self-reliance, Eritrea has also adopted a policy of ownership that would empower its agents to play the primary role in the planning and implementation of programmes, and

allow foreign donors to assist in the creation of structures which underline the importance of capacity-building. However, contamination has been immensely exacerbated during the Ethiopian aggression, and today there exists in Eritrea more than 1.6 million landmines and unexploded ordnance.

After the signing of the Algiers Agreements, the Eritrean Government established the Eritrean Demining Commission for the purpose of coordinating mine clearance operations with UNMEE. The Eritrean Mining Action Programme, which was, in turn, succeeded in 2002 by the Eritrean Demining Authority (EDA) to meet the needs of the times. The objectives of the EDA for the period 2003 to 2007 are to eliminate the strength of mines and unexploded ordnance, facilitate the return of internally displaced persons to their villages, ensure safe use of land and conduct other development activities.

To this end, EDA activities have included, inter alia, evolving a national mine action strategy plan on the basis of a landmine impact survey, establishing the legal and institutional framework for the participation of national and international non-governmental organizations, and overseeing the strict observance and implementation of the Ottawa Convention. Work is progressing well, and the targets set for 2003 to 2007 are on course. In this connection, I wish to acknowledge with thanks the role being played by UNMEE in mine-clearing activities in Eritrea.

Eritrea is convinced that the struggle for the total elimination of landmines and unexploded ordnance must also be waged at the regional level to achieve any credible results. The Horn of Africa is heavily infested by landmines, and only a concerted effort by the countries of the region will achieve any meaningful success. Eritrea is committed to the creation of a landmine-free zone in the Horn of Africa and shall spare no effort towards the achievement, through EDA or any other mechanism, of a zero-victim status for the region within a mutually agreed time frame. Yet, this is predicated on the achievement of peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and that seems to be in doubt since Ethiopia has rejected the Algiers Agreements and the final and binding decision of the Boundary Commission.

I would like to conclude by stressing the following. First, we must always remember that landmines are about human beings, individuals as well as communities, and affect them in the most direct manner — their livelihood. Secondly, without any exaggeration, international cooperation, coordination and assistance are essential to meaningfully alleviate human suffering. Thirdly, it has become increasingly evident that not all of the parties that have acceded to the Convention have been observing its provisions in good faith.

Experience has taught us that the signing of conventions and the adoption of binding resolutions have no meaning at all to lawless States who do not believe in the principle of pacta sunt servanda and have been, in characteristic fashion, systematically and cynically violating the Convention, thus endangering the stability of those law-abiding States — which have been scrupulously observing and implementing its provisions — and the welfare of their populations. Such subversive acts cause a serious threat to the continued validity of the Convention.

The international community has the duty to condemn those countries, including Ethiopia, which continue to recklessly violate the Convention and the rule of law before it becomes too late to rescue the Convention. No amount of naming and shaming will deter them from their systematic violation of conventions with wilful abandon. We are convinced that only by means of credible searches, with strict enforcement measures — the sine qua non of the Ottawa Convention — can the noble principles of the Convention be upheld. Fourthly, it is recognized that, even under the best of circumstances, the elimination of landmines and unexploded ordnance will be a daunting task. In circumstances where Ethiopia is planting new mines — even at the Eritrean Demining Agency — removing them has been extremely difficult. Yet, we are confident that we shall overcome our difficulties by 2007.

Mr. Mpundu (Zambia): I take the floor to express Zambia's commitment to the universalization of the two international Conventions that prohibit the use of mines. These are the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (the Ottawa Convention) and the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons).

This debate, coming after the fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, held from 15 to 19 September, in Bangkok, is timely. It affords the United Nations and the international community, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations an opportunity to coordinate their efforts in mine action.

My delegation is grateful to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his report contained in document A/57/430, which is an excellent catalogue of activities undertaken by the international community in mine action. The report contains information with regard to the inter-agency approach by the United Nations in addressing strategies to mobilize both material and financial resources for mine action. Prominent among these efforts is the implementation of the mine-action strategy for the period 2001 to 2005. My delegation welcomes consultations made by the Secretary-General with Member States on the best way to implement this strategy.

While welcoming the positive response by the international community in support of mine action, my delegation would like to see more improvements in cooperation and coordination of programmes. Civil-military cooperation at the local level should be encouraged and supported. In many countries mine-action centres, while retaining civilian leadership, have drawn experts from the military to undertake humanitarian mine clearance. In order to make optimum use of available human resources, my delegation advocates investing in civil-military institutions to strengthen local capacity-building. Zambia hopes the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining will soon define the appropriate role of the military in mine action.

In order to ensure success in implementing the Mine Action Strategy for the period 2001-2005, Zambia wishes to appeal to the United Nations to emphasize stronger cooperation and coordination of efforts at the regional and subregional levels. Accordingly, my delegation wishes to state that in order to be effective, efforts must be integrated and prioritized. Mine action strategies and activities should be designed and implemented in the broader context of humanitarian and development support. In other words, the development imperatives should be included alongside the humanitarian imperatives.

In recognition of the development imperatives, the Zambian Government has, since 2001, addressed aspects of socio-economic impact of landmines on society. The Zambia Mine Action Centre, with the support of the Government of the United States of America, has designed and is implementing programmes in this regard. Since 2002, the Centre has cleared mines from areas earmarked for a large World Bank-funded project known as the Gweembe-Tonga Development Project, located in the lower Zambezi valley. When completed, the project will alleviate poverty among the people who were displaced by the construction of the Kariba power project in 1956. This is how the mine action strategy can effectively serve the development imperative.

Zambia wishes to take this opportunity to commend the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) for its excellent efforts in coordinating mine action activities. The organization of inter-agency assessment visits to mine-affected countries should be supported. Their visits have a confidence-building character that encourages cooperating partners to commit resources in support of mine action.

My delegation wishes to appeal for extra funds in support of UNMAS's efforts in this regard. As a result, of an inter-agency visit to Zambia, coordinated by UNMAS in 2001, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross have supported the Zambia Mine Action Centre programmes. This is a commendable effort that my Government would like to continue in the years to come.

My delegation wishes to request UNMAS to coordinate another inter-agency visit to Zambia early in 2004, to assess the progress made by the Zambia Mine Action Centre since their last visit in May 2001. My Government wishes in particular to be supported in the destruction of recovered anti-personnel mines.

The Zambia Mine Action Centre requires assistance in the training needs of staff. The management of mine-action centres requires not only good and adequate equipment, but also a well-trained staff. The Zambian Government wishes to take this opportunity to express its appreciation for the support received thus far from the Government of the United States of America. With the support of the Government

of the United States of America, Zambia established and staffed a Mine Action Centre. In spite of these achievements in demining efforts, Zambia requires further support.

As part of Zambia's mine-action strategy, my delegation appeals for the strengthening of the mine-action machinery. In this regard, Zambia welcomes the fact that 141 countries have become States parties to the anti-personnel landmines Convention. That is an encouraging development. Zambia is one of over 110 States that do not have stockpiled anti-personnel mines. I hope that the number of possessors that have completed stockpile destruction will keep on growing each year. Given the successes recorded in recent years in mine action, Zambia hopes that many countries will be declared landmine-free before the end of the mine-action strategy for 2001-2005.

As it has in previous sessions, my delegation shall once again vote in favour of the draft resolution on this item.

Mr. Zenna (Ethiopia): With more than 100 million landmines planted worldwide, the global landmine crisis has become one of the major factors for human insecurity. Landmines inflict physical and emotional injuries and the families and communities of their victims are plagued by psychological and economic burdens. The problem continues to be a serious obstacle to socio-economic progress. Africa, owing to past and ongoing conflicts that have left millions of landmines, is one of the most heavily mined regions of the globe.

Ethiopia is one of the countries most affected by landmines. Unfortunately, the country was immersed in internal and external wars in the 1930s, 1980s and 1990s and, most recently, the war with Eritrea between 1998 and 2000, which led to the contamination of large areas of the country from landmines and unexploded ordnance. According to the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO), there are over 2 million landmines all over the country. Because of landmines and unexploded ordnance, vast tracts of land that are the bases of livelihood of thousands of people — particularly in the northern, eastern and south-eastern regions of the country — have become inaccessible to farmers and pastoralists alike. Moreover, this problem has made the return of refugees and the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons a daunting task. On the basis of the reports from EMAO, there have been some 637 deaths and injuries from landmines and unexploded ordnance.

The Government of Ethiopia has accorded mine action great significance. As a first step, a humanitarian mine-action body, the Ethiopian Mine Action Office, was established in February 2001. So far, with the resources committed from the Government budget, assistance from donors and technical assistance from the United Nations system — specifically the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund — a number of practical mine-action activities have been undertaken in the past few years.

Among the most important accomplishments are the development of a management centre, primarily organizing EMAO and training local staff, and the engagement of international advisers; the equipping and training of four companies of civilian deminers; the development of field capacity and the commencement of demining in May 2002; and the launching of a landmine-impact survey. In view of its importance as a basis for designing a 20-year plan to make the country free of landmines and unexploded ordnance, the early completion of the ongoing landmine-impact survey is one of the top priorities of our mine-action programmes. The survey, which is being conducted by Norwegian Peoples Aid, with assistance from the Survey Action Centre and a start-up fund from several donors, is expected to be completed this year. However, its completion is conditional on the availability of additional outside funding assistance in order to make up the shortfall.

Furthermore, the Government of Ethiopia attaches great importance to enhancing the capacity of EMAO. In effect, it has allocated a budget of close to $3 million for the purpose of mechanizing the works of the Office.

The magnitude of mine contamination and its socio-economic impact puts Ethiopia among the countries that require close attention. The current humanitarian mine-action capacity is still in its initial stage. A substantial amount of resources is needed to sustain the various ongoing projects and to make progress in expanding mine-action activities in the country. Accordingly, we call upon donors and concerned international organizations to enhance their assistance and cooperation, particularly in equipping, training and deploying additional companies of

deminers; establishing rapid response teams; assisting in the timely completion of the landmine-impact survey; creating mine-awareness and victim assistance programmes; and providing technical training and financial assistance to enhance the capacity of EMAO.

Finally, we believe that the mobilization of States, civil societies and governmental and non-governmental organizations plays a critical role in the eradication of landmines and unexploded ordnance and in dealing with their socio-economic and political consequences.

Ethiopia remains committed to this noble cause and will continue to make its own contribution to this collective endeavour. At the same time, we have been beneficiaries of the global collective efforts in our task of addressing the severe landmine problem in our country and we wish to thank all donor countries, international organizations and concerned non-governmental organizations for their invaluable assistance and cooperation.

Mr. Saeed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me on behalf of my delegation to thank the Secretary-General for his report under agenda item 22 on assistance in mine action and for his efforts to act on the six goals enumerated in the United Nations mine-action strategy for the period 2001-2005.

We also offer particular thanks to the assessment and field missions to my country and all those affected by mines, as well as to all the international and regional organizations, institutions and non-governmental organizations active in this field.

Sudan is now a full-fledged partner in international efforts to combat landmines, particularly anti-personnel mines. It is one of the first countries to sign the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and it formally ratified the Convention in October, following the high-level Bangkok Conference held in September of this year. We have taken these measures because we are keenly aware of the seriousness of the harm done to humans because of such mines. Mines cause permanent, disabling injuries and disfigurement of civilians, especially children, who are disproportionately affected. This is in addition to mines placing major obstacles on the road to construction and economic development and obstructing projects of demobilization, reintegration and resettling in many countries for many years to come, especially countries that are undergoing transition from war to peace. It is for those reasons that Sudan has voted in the First Committee in support of all resolutions on the implementation of the Ottawa Convention. Moreover, we wish to declare our full support for all similar resolutions, as we are convinced that anti-mine action can only be successful if there is multilateral regional and international coordination and cooperation.

Nationally, we have been pursuing ongoing efforts through a Sudanese mine action campaign, in collaboration with of the United Nations Mine Action Service programme. The work of this programme is carried out within the framework of the office of the Sudanese commissioner for humanitarian aid and the Sudanese civil engineering unit with a view to establishing a national centre for mine action. Such a centre would contain a databank and a specialized cartographic agency. We have established training programmes in the anti-mine action field and are carrying out cooperative efforts with the European Union, as well as with a number of other national and international organizations. Finally, in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund, we are working to make the public aware of the dangers of mines.

The problems posed by landmines and unexploded ordnance have for some time now been an obstacle in our national reconstruction and development efforts. Nevertheless, Sudan is now on the point of signing a comprehensive peace agreement that will turn the page on that part of our history and make it possible for us to step up our efforts to combat mines. Our work in the Nubian mountain region, undertaken in cooperation with the United Nations and the European Union, has made it possible for many of our citizens to return to their villages and resume their agricultural activities. That, of course, gives us a great deal of hope. For that reason, we attach great importance to the implementation of the United Nations mine action strategy and are eager to cooperate with any and all parties concerned.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the United Nations for its efforts and its programme, from which we have benefited and which have helped the Sudanese mine action campaign in its work. We would also like to reiterate the importance of the technical assistance rendered to mine-affected developing countries in helping them to elaborate effective national programmes, leading to the complete elimination of

mines. We would like to call upon all those who have not yet done so to ratify the Ottawa Convention, thus lending their support to the choice already made by the majority of the family of nations for a better, mine-free world.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): First, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on assistance in mine action (A/58/260), which allows us to take stock of where we are now, review what has already been accomplished and consider proposals for future measures in this area.

Laos continues to suffer the consequences of the heaviest bombardment in history, which occurred over the course of a very long and protracted war. During the period from 1963 to 1972, 2 million tons of cluster bombs were dropped. Fifteen of our 18 provinces were affected and more than 50 per cent of our total landmass is contaminated. Those "bomblets" can be found anywhere in Laos — in towns, villages, schools, hills — anywhere. To deal with the problem, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has established a trust fund on unexploded ordnance. The objective of the fund is fourfold: first, to raise the awareness of our population to the danger; secondly, to clear the contaminated land; thirdly, to undertake a survey of the affected areas; and lastly, but not least, to train our nationals to work in this field. We have logged some major achievements already: approximately 25 square kilometres have been cleared; we have raised the awareness of approximately 1 million inhabitants to the existing danger; and, most importantly, we have been able to train some 1,000 nationals in mine-clearance work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our friends in the donor community — the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Finland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy and the Republic of Korea — for their financial contributions to our trust fund.

This assistance is not only humanitarian assistance. It is also development assistance. It is about the issue of development. It is about poverty eradication and sustainable development. If the idea is to help our country reduce or eradicate poverty, we think that the Lao People's Democratic Republic deserves to be assisted in the field.

As I said, a lot has been achieved, but, of course, much remains to be done. It is our fervent hope that the international community, and particularly our donor friends, will continue to help us as the Lao People's Democratic Republic endeavours to cope with this unexploded ordnance problem and help us move ahead in our developmental efforts.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. Two representatives have requested to exercise the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second intervention, and should be made by delegates from their seats.

Mr. Zenna (Ethiopia): I apologize for taking the floor, but I am forced to because of the Eritrean intervention.

It is a surprise for me to hear from a representative of a country that managed to go to war with all its neighbours in its short life of independence accusing Ethiopia of aggression. We all know, and it was clear from the very beginning, that the war with Eritrea in 1998 was triggered by the invasion of Eritrean forces; that was confirmed and investigated by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1998. The OAU report and investigation clearly stated that Eritrea was the aggressor and the invader. But the Eritrean style of typically hiding naked aggression is not new to our delegation.

We have also been accused by Eritrea of violating an anti-mine convention. Maybe it means the Ottawa Convention. That is also a surprise, because Ethiopia, as a founding Member of the United Nations with an unimpeachable record of respecting international law — including treaties and conventions to which it is a party or to which it is a signatory — has never violated any convention or treaty and has never been accused of doing so by any relevant organization. But the Eritrean delegation has accused Ethiopia of violating the anti-mine Convention.

Eritrea has also accused Ethiopia of planting new mines in Eritrea. That is also a naked lie. Such accusations, coming as they do from the Eritrean side, prove that nothing other than lies can be expected from this delegation.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): We have just heard the Ethiopian representative on the question of aggression, on the question of pacta sunt servanda and the question of landmines. If I had the time, I would reply to the question of aggression, which we addressed in the plenary during the general debate and in the First Committee — both very appropriate forums.

But right now let me begin by addressing the issue of landmines. As usual, I will make references to third-party documents, including the report of the Secretary-General. If that report was a lie, so be it. In the first place, the Ethiopian Government has been, throughout the past six years, of course, inundating meetings with unverifiable allegations every time the Eritrean Government produced third-party documents. The objective is to create enough confusion and doubt to ensure that a frustrated and uncaring world will declare a plague on both houses. Unfortunately, that tactic may have worked. I shall not dwell on Ethiopia's violation in detail. I will refer only to the report of the Secretary-General and to one newspaper account.

In 1999 Steven Edwards wrote in *The National Post* of 21 April 1999, identifying only three countries that have been witnessed planting new mines in conflict areas. Among the three identified is Ethiopia. That establishes the fact.

As to the cooperation with the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea and the fulfilment of its obligations, I would like to quote the Secretary-General's report of 8 March 2002 (S/2002/245). On page 4, there is reference to mine actions. In paragraph 19, it refers to Eritrea:

> "Currently, more than 1,100 Eritrean mine action personnel work in the Temporary Security Zone; they are organized in 18 manual clearance groups, six mechanical clearance teams, six explosive ordnance disposal and survey units, 13 mine risk education teams, three survey and marking teams, and two explosive detection dog units."

Regarding the Ethiopian side, paragraph 22 of the same section states the following:

> "As you will recall from my last progress report, a series of meetings at the Ethiopian Ministry of Defence in October had resulted in the exchange of vital Ethiopian mine-related information. Having studied that information, UNMEE is seeking further clarification from the Ethiopian authorities on the types of mines used in the Temporary Security Zone and the adjacent areas, as well as more specific information on minefields already cleared by the Ethiopian Armed Forces. Delivery of this information has been promised in the near future and is eagerly awaited."

If members recall my statement, I said that, at first, Ethiopia refused to provide those maps, and when it did, they were found to be functionally useless. That is what paragraph 22 refers to.

The Ethiopian representative also talks about Ethiopia adhering scrupulously to all agreements it has signed. It has been only three weeks since the Ethiopian Government rejected the Algiers Agreement in a letter dated 19 September from its Prime Minister. The President of the Security Council responded in a letter to the Prime Minister. Permit me to quote extensively from that letter:

> "... the members of the Security Council steadfastly support the completion of the peace process and the full and expeditious implementation of the Algiers Agreement. ... Only the full implementation of the Algiers Agreement will lead to sustainable peace.
>
> "The members of the Security Council wish to convey to you their deep regret at the intention of the Government of Ethiopia not to accept the entirety of the delimitation and demarcation decision as decided by the Boundary Commission. ...
>
> "The members of the Security Council, therefore, call upon the Government of Ethiopia to provide its full and prompt cooperation to the Boundary Commission and its field officers. ...
>
> "Finally, I have been asked by the members of the Security Council to remind Ethiopia of the obligations of both parties ... to bring the peace process to a successful conclusion."

How much clearer could the letter be about violations?

The question of aggression has been addressed several times. The aggression issue revolves around the village of Badme, which was the flashpoint. The Boundary Commission has decided that Badme is entirely on Eritrea sovereign territory. The question

that we must ask, then, is: where is Badme? In the answer, one will find the definitions of aggression and aggressor, of who the aggressor is and who the victim of aggression is.

The President: I now call on the representative of Ethiopia, who wishes to speak a second time in exercise of the right of reply. The intervention is limited to five minutes.

Mr. Zenna (Ethiopia): With regard to the Boundary Commission's decision, Ethiopia is committed to the Algiers Agreement. We have never retreated from that position. We are in agreement with the Algiers Agreement. What happened with the Boundary Commission was clear, and we have already written our reply to the relevant United Nations authorities and other guarantors of that peaceful solution. Therefore, this issue is now in the hands of those who can consider it further. To Ethiopia, however, the Boundary Commission and the Algiers Agreement are now two different things. The Algiers Agreement states that it is the road for us to follow, but the Boundary Commission's decision is not consistent with the Algiers Agreement. That is our argument, and it is stated clearly in our reply to the authorities.

The President: I now call on the representative of Eritrea, who wishes to speak for a second and final time in exercise of the right of reply. The intervention is limited to five minutes.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): I shall be brief. This is stupefying. We are now told that

The President: I ask that appropriate use of language be observed; there is no place in our discussion for the word "stupid" or "stupefying".

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): I did not say "stupid", Sir. I am sorry. What I was saying was that it is amazing — if you want me to change the word — that one is now dissociating the Boundary Commission — which is the central institution of the Algiers Agreement and is mandated by the Security Council to reach a final and binding decision — from the Algiers Agreement, in which case the principle of pacta sunt servanda would have no place.

The President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 22.

Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to announce that, owing to the lateness of the hour, the General Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 20, "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies", on Monday, 10 November 2003, in the morning, as the first item; as the second item, the third report of the General Committee (A/58/250/Add.2); as the third item, agenda item 36, "Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity on the aerial and naval military attack against the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya by the present United States Administration in April 1986"; as the fourth item, a joint debate on agenda items 25, "University for Peace", and 44, "Culture of peace"; as the fifth item, agenda item 16 (b), "Election of twenty-nine members of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme; and, as the sixth item, agenda item 42, "Follow-up to the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage", to take action on draft resolution A/58/L.11.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.